

TO ALL THE

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GENERAL BAPTIST CHURCHES

IN

*England. — Churches
and Religious
Bodies*

GREAT BRITAIN,

THIS PLAN

*— Baptists. General
Assembly of General
Baptists.*

Is Humbly Presented,

AND

Offered to their candid Consideration.

Prove all Things: hold fast that which is Good.

I Thess. v. 21.

CANTERBURY

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M.DCC.LXXXIV.



THE following is part of a plan that was laid before the Messengers, Elders, and Representatives of those Churches that constituted the Annual Assembly of General Baptists, held at their Meeting House in WORSHIP STREET, LONDON, JUNE 11, 1783, and by their desire it is now distributed amongst most of our churches in this kingdom, for their consideration and approbation ; with this earnest request, that each of you will, with Christian zeal and patience, seriously and candidly consider of, and discuss these important propositions. And if you think they will be productive of the spiritual welfare of the churches in general, and tend to promote the present and future happiness of the members that compose them, you are desired to send your Elders, or Representatives, to the next

General Assembly, to be held at the Baptist Meeting House, WORSHIP STREET, LONDON, on WEDNESDAY and THURSDAY in Whitsun Week, being JUNE the 2d and 3d, 1784. And it is hoped that each of them will come sufficiently instructed, and empowered by you, to adopt and carry into execution the said plan, with such additions and alterations as shall then be thought prudent to make in it. And may the Great Lord of the Vineyard graciously afford them such divine helps, in that solemn assembly, as may enable them to transact these important affairs with brotherly kindness, and Christian condescension, and abundantly bless and crown their labours, by the future happiness and prosperity of his churches.

TO THE
ASSEMBLY, &c.

Christian Friends,

I BELIEVE that the principles of the General Baptists are far more consistent with the Gospel of our dear Saviour, his example and precepts, and the practice of his primitive followers, than those of any other denomination whatever. And this is a truth so very clear, that numbers do not scruple privately to own it; though interest, shame, or prejudice, prevents their embracing of it. And this verifies what our Great Master foretold, that as he was so also his little flock, as well as his precepts and commands, should be despised and neglected of men; who, in the general, like the Scribes and Pharisees of old, would teach and adhere to doctrines and commandments of their own, rather than to those of God. Yet, notwithstanding the purity and truth of our principles,
I think

I think the General Baptist Churches, in the Southern parts of this kingdom, are certainly in a declining condition, owing to several causes, too discernible amongst us. But waving the discussion of these, I would earnestly recommend to your serious consideration some things, which, I think, if duly attended to, and improved by your wise and prudent deliberations, assisted by the good Spirit of our God, will doubtless answer the most desirable and salutary purposes, in restoring to our churches that pristine unity, love, and zeal, that vital and experimental religion, which hath too long been declining amongst us. And also be one great means of enabling many of our members to be much more useful in their generation, by putting them in possession of those blessings of life, without which, be they ever so well disposed, they can neither relieve their poor brethren, nor be so useful in their churches, as otherwise they might be.

For though our cause is good, and our principles founded as on a rock; and though Christ hath said, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against his church; yet, if we neglect the means and mercies that he hath bestowed upon us; abuse his grace, and slight his love, and grow lukewarm in his cause, we can expect no other than to be disregarded by him. We must not depend upon the soundness of our faith only, for the
truth

true truth itself will not make us free, unless we are ~~free~~ to it; nor the purest principles support us, if we do not most vigorously act consistent with them, and exert ourselves to make our calling and election sure. Neither can we enjoy those blessings of life, by which we may be enabled to do good, to distribute and communicate, without we vigorously exert ourselves to obtain them. With as much propriety might the husbandman expect to reap without ploughing or sowing, because God hath promised that seed time and harvest shall never fail, as for us to expect that our churches will increase in Christian graces, in numbers, and in every comfortable good, and flourish, without our using our utmost endeavours, to bring about so desirable a purpose. And therefore it is that I wish you to exert yourselves, that the following plan, with such additions as you shall think proper to make, may be printed, sent to, and earnestly recommended to all the General Baptist Churches in this kingdom.

And first, I would recommend that this assembly meet earlier in the morning, at the usual day and place; and if it be thought necessary to have a sermon first, as is usual, let the minister appointed to preach it begin the service exactly at half past nine o'clock. And as soon as he has finished, let some friend open the assembly with a suitable prayer. And the Chairman and Moderator
being

being chosen, and also two persons to act as clerks, in minuting down the answers of the Representatives to the several questions, &c. And the minutes of the last assembly being read and confirmed, let the chairman call over the churches in order, and let the several questions which follow, with as many others as you shall think proper to add, be asked each of them separately, and let their answers be all set down by the clerks, and also such remarks and recommendations as you shall think proper to make, for the use of the church.

Question I. What Pastors, Ministers, and Deacons, have you in your church?

By the answer to this question it will appear if the Church is in want of Ministers, or if they have any more than are necessary. If one of our Churches was asked, I suppose they would answer two Pastors and one Minister. Should they be asked if they could spare one, I suppose they would answer yes, we have a promising young Minister amongst us, whom we believe capable of being useful in any society that should want him, and we think that he would be willing to serve them, if a comfortable situation in business could be there found for him.

Question II. Is strict scriptural discipline maintained in your church?

If they should answer in the negative, this would give an opportunity for advice, &c. I believe the Dis-senters formerly were very strict in maintaining it, and they

they flourished, and new churches were raised almost as fast as they now decline! Let us try and maintain strict scripture discipline as they did; there can be no great danger of losing by it (says a great man) but a great probability of its answering good purposes.

The Quakers have no provision amongst them for what we call instruction, but vice seems restrained, and their societies maintained in their pristine order chiefly by their discipline.

Question III. Is the word of God stat-
edly and constantly administered among
you?

If it is not, ask the reason.

Question IV. Do your members make
good their places among you at the stated
times of publick worship, and at the Lord's
Supper?

If not, as is too much the case, particularly in the
morning of the Lord's day, this question will give an
opportunity for reproof, &c.

Question V. Have you any conferences,
or prayer meetings, amongst you?

If they should answer in the negative, let them be
advised to establish them. If in the affirmative, let
them be asked, if thought proper, what advantages
have accrued to their church from them. I think they
have been exceedingly useful, and I have reason to be-
lieve they have been attended with much good to the
church to which I belong in general, and in particular
I believe they have been one great means, under God,

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of raising up from amongst us six young ministers in the course of twelve years. And we have reason to rejoice in the present promising appearance of some young men that attend our conferences and prayer meetings, so that I can but wish them strongly recommended and encouraged.

Question VI. Is a due regard paid to the improvement of youth, and are the promising gifts for the ministry tried and encouraged?

If not, let it be recommended, for this seems to be the most probable way, by the blessing of Providence, of raising up a succession of useful ministers amongst us.

Question VII. Are your poor and needy members attended to with brotherly care and kindness?

This I think is a necessary question, and if we wish to hear our dear Redeemer and Judge say to us at the last great day, Come ye blessed of my Father, &c. &c. I think we shall all readily make this enquiry, that so if any of our poor are neglected, the cause may be known; and if it should appear that the most opulent in some of our churches are not able to supply the wants of their poor brethren, let some of the neighbouring churches who are able contribute thereto. And as our poor brethren do not enjoy a sufficiency of the blessings of this life as to enable them to attend this assembly, it will be some comfort and consolation to them, to find they are not forgotten by those that have.

Question

Question VIII. Is your church on the increase, or decline.

If on the decline enquire the cause.

Question IX. Did your church meet together to consider what business you had to bring before this assembly, and what things might tend to the interest and advancement of religion?

I think every church should meet together to chuse representatives, and to take care that they are enabled to answer all the questions; and by asking this question every time, I think our churches will be more likely to do it.

Question X. Is there any special business from your church?

I would also recommend, that the assembly endeavour to cultivate afresh the correspondence that once subsisted between them and the church at Charles-Town, South Carolina; and also with those at Dublin.

I think it would answer a valuable purpose, if there can be found one or two good preachers amongst us, who can leave their business, or who have none, let them yearly visit and preach to all the churches throughout this kingdom, and let their expences be paid them by the churches. I think we have lately had proof of the utility of this.

After these questions of a religious nature have been answered, and proper advice and recommendations given to all the churches as it appears necessary, I would recommend that all the different churches be called over the second time, and each of them asked the following questions, of a temporal nature, and that their answers be all minuted down by the clerk, the same as before.

For I cannot but think that this plan, if properly attended to, will be the means of forming such a trading connection amongst us, as will be attended with many advantages to us. The manufacturers of any commodity will know where to find the venders; and the vender will know where to buy his goods on the best terms. Farms, shops, &c. to be let, and the good situations for business, will be known to those that want them, &c. And those mutual good offices which ought always to subsist between each other, will be kept up, and encouraged by interest as well as principle.

I think with an eminent minister, who expresses himself thus, that religion and business should go hand in hand together. Like St. Paul, I think, we should say, not slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord.

I wish it were in the power of all my Christian brethren, to provide things honest, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in

in the sight of men; and not only to provide for themselves, and those of their own household, but that they had such a sufficiency, as would enable them to do good to all men, especially to those of the household of faith; to be rich in good works, to distribute and communicate to all their wanting fellow creatures, to be abundantly useful in their generation, and to the church, or churches, to which they belong.

Question I. What are the names of the manufacturers among you, and what the commodity manufactured.

I understand that some of our friends in Derbyshire have lead mines, marble quarries, &c. Others in Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, &c. manufacture hosiery, as stockings, gloves, &c. &c. And in Warwickshire, ribbands, &c. In Berkshire, lace. In Yorkshire and Norfolk, cloth, coarse cloaths, &c. In Staffordshire, hardware, tools, nails, &c. In Hertfordshire, canvas, curtains, blinds, &c. In Kent, sail cloths, worsted, paper, &c.

In Lincolnshire they grow hemp and flax, &c. In Kent and Sussex, hops, &c. &c.

Now by the answers to these questions, our plumbers would know of whom to get their lead on the best terms, as they sell it either in ore or smelted; our masons their marble; our drapers, hosiery, shopkeepers, &c. their cloth, cloaths, stockings, gloves, lace, ribbands, hardware, canvas, curtains; our ironmongers, their tools, nails, &c.

Question

Question II. What are the names of the tradesmen belonging to your society, and what their occupations?

By the answer to this our manufacturers will know who to apply to for sale of their goods, it giving the same opportunity to the manufacturer, as the other question does for the vender to apply to them. And had this been known five years ago, one of our manufacturers might have maintained his credit, without being forced, as he was, to apply to his benevolent fellow Christians for relief.

For the American war commencing he could not vend his goods, and though there was people amongst us that would have sold them for him, he did not know how to find them out, nor they him; nay several pounds were laid out for curtains for our meeting, to a person that we were not at all obliged to, whilst our suffering brother could not vend those he manufactured.

By these answers, friends in Yorkshire, &c. will know to whom to apply to get business done in the southern countries, without the expence and trouble of a journey. Such a case as this happened lately. Our manufacturers, tradesmen, farmers, &c. can deal with each other on the best terms, without merchants, factors, &c. being employed between them, who generally make a considerable advantage, which will on this plan fall to the share of the industrious farmers, manufacturers, tradesmen, &c. &c.

Question III. Is there any farms, shops, or business of any kind, to be disposed of, among you, or near you.

Had this been known by all the churches before, it is more than probable that two very good shops for trade, (in which the occupiers, who were Baptists, got thousands) might still have been in the occupation of some

some of our friends, but are now in the hands of persons not connected with us. Many other good situations for business have been lost amongst us, when industrious members of other churches have been in want of them. And as similar things may happen, let us take care and provide for them in time.

Question IV. Are there any persons among you that are waiting for business, and what will suit them?

Question V. Is there any masters or mistresses among you that want apprentices, or other servants?

For want of knowing who there is among our own people that want apprentices, &c. our youth are often put to such masters as take no care of their morals, which has too often been attended with bad consequences.

Question VI. Are there any youths fit for apprentices, or other servants that want places among you?

And the necessary collections having been received from the representatives, as they were called over, let the messengers' and other accompts be audited as usual.

These questions being asked, and as many others as you think proper to add, and the answers to them, and every other particular being minuted down by the clerk, let it be strongly

strongly recommended to the churches, that they observe and endeavour, to the utmost of their power, to put them in practice.

Desire them to meet together every year, to appoint one or two proper persons to keep a book, in which all the business of this kind is to be registered. I think all the business done at the assembly, the manufacturers, tradesmen's names, occupations, the farms, shops, and business to be disposed of, the persons wanting business, places, and of what kind they want, the different letters sent to them and their answers, and every other particular, should be entered.

Desire them to establish quarterly meetings, similar to those in East and West Kent, and other places, where as many churches as lye contiguous to each other meet together. Let the register keepers carry their books to these meetings, and let them take particular account of the business brought before them, and send it to every other quarterly meeting in the kingdom, by which means the business to be disposed of, &c. &c. would be known to all our friends four times a year.

Let a proper person be appointed every assembly to draw up a circular letter of admonition, advice and instruction, &c. for the use of churches, against the next assembly, and if it be there approved of, let it be printed and dispersed among the churches, with the transactions of the assembly.

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Let proper persons be appointed to correct the minutes of the clerks, and to prepare them for the press, and let him get a sufficient number printed to send five, ten, or twenty, to every church in the kingdom, according to the number of members in them. And if there be no other business to do, let the assembly be dismissed with a suitable prayer.

I suppose some of you will say, that the execution of this plan will be attended with trouble and expence. I own it. And I ask, if you can accomplish your own business without? You will answer in the negative. And can we give ourselves trouble, and put ourselves to expence, to execute our own concerns, and shall we do neither for the cause of our master Christ, who did so much for us, and for the good of our fellow Christians, fellow creatures, the rising generation, and for the prosperity of the church, or churches, to which we belong? I hope better things, my friends, and shall therefore propose the following plan, to carry these designs into execution.

1st. Let proper persons be appointed to visit all the churches in the kingdom, to persuade them to come into it.

Suppose friend Boorman be desired to visit the churches in Kent. Friend Evershed, those in Sussex and Hampshire. Friend Dan Taylor, those in Yorkshire. Friend John

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Deacon,

Deacon, those in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, &c. Friend Finch, those in Norfolk and Cambridgehire. Friend Boyce, those in Lincolnshire. Friend Fenn, those in Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, and Berkshire. Friend S. Kingsford, those in Middlesex, Essex, and Surry. Friend Toulmin, those in the West of England, &c. &c.

And if from any unforeseen cause, any of these persons should be unable to undertake it, desire them to write immediately to the committee, appointed by you to transact the necessary business.

2d. Then let it be recommended, that the ministers, or other suitable persons, in the different churches, do attend the person so sent, to the next neighbouring church, to assist them in persuading of that church to comply with this request; as for instance, suppose friend Boorman was now at Dover, let their minister attend him to Deal; and having done their business there, let the Dover minister go back, and the Deal minister attend Mr. Boorman to the next church; and so on, &c.

3d. Let one thousand of these plans, with the persons names whom you have appointed to visit the churches, together with your recommendations, &c. be printed, and sent to all the churches in the kingdom, five, ten,
or

or twenty, to each church, according to the number of members, that so they may be prepared to meet and assist those persons nominated by you to call upon them.

4th. Recommend to the churches, and opulent fellow Christians in connection with us, that they exert themselves to make a liberal collection for defraying the expences attending the execution of this plan, and that they do pay the same unto those persons that are appointed by you to visit them, or to such persons in London whom you shall nominate to receive it, and that it be paid to them on or before the assembly next ensuing.

5th. Appoint a committee of two or three persons, whose places of residence are not far distant from each other, to answer letters, and transact the other business that may be necessary to be done, to forward this work, before the next assembly. And if from any unforeseen causes, any of the persons desired to visit the churches cannot do it, let this committee write to, and get it done, by such person or persons as shall appear to them to be best qualified for the purpose.

And as we have men amongst us qualified for this business, and also men whom Providence hath blessed with plenty, I hope they will chearfully contribute towards the expence that may attend the execution of these designs; and, I think, that if you are pleased to put them in execution, you will find per-

sons ready and willing to go and persuade the churches to come into it, and others as willing to contribute towards defraying their expences, &c.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

N. B. In the letter of the proceedings of the Association of Ministers, &c. held at Nottingham June the 11th and 12th, 1783, it is said, that this plan in general gains the approbation of the association, and it is agreed to read it to the several churches, to see if they will encourage the same.

And one of the most eminent ministers amongst our Calvinist brethren, speaking of it in a letter to a friend, says, I admire the prudence and benevolence of the plan you wish our associations to adopt. O that there was in them such an heart.

And as we have men amongst us, who are not only willing to be distressed, but also to be distressed with plenty, I hope they will cheerfully contribute towards the execution of this plan, and I think that you are pleased with it. How now, my friends, in execution, Dearly
and

Dearly Beloved Brethren,

THE last General Assembly, to whom this plan was presented, not having time sufficiently to discuss and carry it into execution; and thinking also that a considerable expence might be saved, if the churches could be prevailed upon by letter to adopt it, instead of sending persons to each church, as mentioned in it, agreed to request the proposer of it to print it, and send it to all the churches.—In compliance hereto, he will endeavour to send some copies to every society that he hath any knowledge of, and if any should be omitted, either through ignorance of them, or by mistake, those churches near, who have them, are desired to send them one. And further, each church is earnestly desired to send a letter to *William Kingsford, of Barton Mill, near Canterbury*, and that before the 25th day of April, 1784, containing their resolutions hereon, together with the names of their Elders, Ministers, Deacons, &c. the number of their members; names and occupations

pations of their manufacturers, tradesmen, &c. and as many other particulars as is thought proper to add.

Permit me to remind you, my dear friends, of the state of our churches in time past; when our forefathers were forced to assemble together, for the purposes of religious worship in the most lonesome and solitary places; when, for the sake of a good conscience, and those sacred truths of the gospel which we profess, persecutions and fines, imprisonments and bonds, stripes and death, awaited them. Yea, they counted not their lives so dear to themselves as those precious truths which they have handed down to us, their posterity. For it then pleased the Almighty to dig and prune our churches by his judgments. But when the glorious revolution took place in these kingdoms, persecution ceased, and our churches, refined in the furnace of affliction, were prosperous and happy; and since that time it may indeed be said, that God hath hedged us about by his Providence, and watered and refreshed us by his mercies. But, alas! where are the fruits

fruits he might justly expect? Surely the words of Christ to his churches of old, are applicable to us. Be watchful and strengthen the things which remain that are ready to die. For I have not found thy works perfect before God. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast and repent, least I fight against thee with the sword of my mouth. And should we be accused in that awful day of retribution, which will surely come, of neglecting and slighting these truths and privileges, which our progenitors so dearly prized, what shall we answer. O therefore let us stir up ourselves to take hold upon God, to seek his face, and to give him the glory due unto his name. Let us set up in our hearts a pillar of gratitude to the Lord our God, and not be so ungrateful and foolish as to trifle with the valuable truths, opportunities, and means of grace, which he in great mercy hath afforded us: But, as members of the body of Christ, let us vigorously exert ourselves; and by every necessary means, endeavour to support the life and spirit of religion in our different societies, for the prosperity of which

we ought to be most ardently concerned; to yield our best powers, and manifest our most active endeavours, that so glorious and valuable an end may be accomplished. And I hope if this plan is carried into execution with becoming spirit, that by the blessing of Almighty God it will contribute to the growth of our Redeemer's kingdom amongst us, and be greatly conducive to the spiritual welfare of our churches.

Give me leave also just to suggest, the temporal advantages that may accrue, for we are to manifest our love to God, by seeking each others temporal, as well as spiritual good; and the joining the one with the other, will doubtless tend to keep alive our sentiments in the most important matters; it will be a double spur to our alacrity; and I hope, by the blessing of Providence, the means of enabling many of our members to be more abundantly and extensively useful.

With this also may be joined, that social connection, that general and particular acquaintance

quaintance with one another, which this plan will be productive of, a spirit of friendly intercourse will take place amongst us, and that not on a confined, but on a most wide and extensive bottom.

Add to this the encouragement it will give to the rising generation to be connected with our societies; for when they observe our mutual love for, and our good offices one to another, and see their interest in both worlds so carefully attended to, it can but stimulate them to join with, and strongly attach them to our churches.

The utility of thus joining the business of life and religion together, is most strikingly manifested in the Quakers; a people extensive in their acquaintance, successful in their business, distinguishedly useful one to another as a body: And all this owing to similar connections in religion and business with that now proposed.

And now, Christian friends, my fervent wish is, that both ministers and people would

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most seriously and ardently consider of the things here proposed; and that you stir up each others minds by encouraging motives, willingly to accept of, and readily and diligently to attend to those parts of this business, in which your assistance is necessary. And that your elders, or representatives, come prepared to aid and assist at the next general assembly, in further promoting the glory of our Redeemer's kingdom; and the happiness and prosperity of all our churches. And let it be the fervent prayer of every one of us, that Zion's God will go before us, and make our way prosperous; that he will build up the walls of our Jerusalem, and make peace and prosperity to dwell therein; that our candlestick may be of pure gold, that so the Lord Jesus may delight to walk in the midst of us, and to bless us, and that the only contest amongst us may be, who shall excel in love and usefulness to mankind.

Now unto him that is able to keep us from falling, and to present us faultless before

before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory, and majesty, dominion and power, both now and for ever. Amen,



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This letter of 1830 is from the Particular Baptist Association
and is out of place here.